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## No. II.

## MARBLE TABLETS FOR MINIATURE PAINTERS.

*The SILVER ISIS MEDAL was presented to THOMAS CARRICK, Esq., of Newcastle-on-Tyne, for his Marble Tablets for the use of Miniature Painters, one of which has been placed in the Society's Repository.*

*Leazes' Terrace, Newcastle-upon-Tyne,*

SIR,

*March 5, 1838.*

IN the pursuit of my profession as a miniature painter, I was, some years ago, led to adopt a new material to paint upon, which I have since constantly employed, and found to answer the purpose so very well, and to possess so many recommendations, that I am induced to lay an account of it before the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, and therefore trouble you with this communication.

In taking this step, my view is also publicly to assert my claim to an invention original with me, and, as far as I know, quite new. Another consideration is, that my invention is gradually becoming known and practised, especially in the north of England, and I am anxious to facilitate the progress of my brother artists, by giving them all the information I possess upon the subject, which, although readily communicated, is the result of several years experience.

The substance I use for painting upon is white marble, which I have supplied to me by the marble mason, sawn into slabs of various sizes, the thickness increasing with their size. The common size I use for a

miniature is  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches long,  $4\frac{3}{4}$  wide, and  $\frac{3}{16}$  thick; another size is 8 inches long by 7 wide, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick; and a third,  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches long,  $8\frac{1}{4}$  wide, and  $\frac{5}{16}$  thick; but to avoid the great weight that large slabs would have if made proportionally thick, they may be strengthened by being cemented upon millboard, and consequently kept thinner.

The mason prepares each slab on one side with a surface, which he understands by the term "well-grounded," meaning a surface smooth and free from scratches, produced by rubbing the slab from the saw with stones gradually proceeding from coarse to fine. In this state I keep the slabs by me, and, when one is wanted for use, I give it what I have found, after many trials, to be the best surface for painting upon, by rubbing it with Water-of-Ayr stone, keeping it at the time moistened with water, and using short circular strokes. This, after a while, makes the surface perfectly smooth and fine without polish, and of a dead white; and I find the slab takes colour more freely if prepared in this way within a few days of being used. By varying the Water-of-Ayr stone used in this last operation as to hardness and texture, the taste of the artist may be exactly suited, whether he may prefer a perfectly smooth or a somewhat rougher surface to paint upon.

In stating the advantages I conceive marble to possess as a substance for painting upon in miniature, I shall be obliged to compare it with the only other material extensively used for the same purpose, viz. ivory; and in doing so, I wish it to be understood that I have no desire to undervalue that exceedingly useful, and, for very small pictures, still indispensable article.

But, compared with ivory, there can be no doubt that

marble possesses a great superiority in point of colour ; for, although ivory is almost white when recently cut, or when subjected to a peculiar bleaching process which it can be made to undergo, yet, by exposure to light and air, it gradually changes to a buff colour, which is a tint very agreeable indeed to work upon, but scarcely adapted to the representation of objects requiring, in their lighter parts, a very cold tint. This, however, might be managed by the artist ; but a worse objection is, that in process of time their light parts being but slightly or not at all protected by colour, gradually become still darker, and the effect of the picture is injured or destroyed.

Marble, on the contrary, supplies the artist with a perfectly white ground, not liable to change during any lapse of time, and ready to receive whatever tint fancy may suggest, or his subject require.

The smoothness of surface, and peculiar absorbent quality of ivory, render it a most valuable substance to the miniature painter ; but marble, prepared in the way I have detailed, possesses a surface equally smooth ; and, although the first coat of colour is more greedily absorbed, yet it afterwards, in this respect, can scarcely be distinguished from ivory.

Ivory has the very obvious disadvantage, that it cannot be procured but in pieces of a small size ; and though means have been devised to cement it upon other surfaces, and level the joinings : yet the pieces are very liable to warp and separate by even slight variations of temperature. Marble, on the contrary, can be procured in whole slabs, of almost any dimensions. The artist may consult his own wishes as to the size of his picture, and, should he be even disposed to enlarge beyond the ordinary size of a full-length miniature, he may do so to any moderate

extent, by cementing the slab upon millboard, as already detailed. Under such circumstances, the only resource of the artist has hitherto been paper, which, as to capability of high finish, will bear no comparison with marble.

In hot and variable climates, even whole pieces of ivory are apt to warp and twist, and, after a while, from this cause, to split, and break into cracks; and I have been told of many valuable pictures having been thus spoiled. However exposed to atmospherical heat or cold, moisture or dryness, marble will obviously preserve its form.

The liability of ivory to mildew is a serious evil, as the slightest exposure to damp will generally produce this appearance; and it often occurs without any assignable cause, leaving, in many cases, a yellow stain upon the picture, which cannot be removed. Marble is entirely free from this disadvantage.

The permanence of pictures painted upon marble is a very important inquiry. Perhaps the art has not been long enough in existence to enable us thoroughly to determine this point; but I have never perceived the slightest change in even my earliest pictures, and some of them have been painted seven or eight years, and exposed during that time, in the way pictures are usually, in damp rooms, and to smoke and fumes of various kinds, which is so far conclusive. It is not, I think, probable, that any chemical action can take place between the marble and the colours to destroy them; but this is a point I am yet unable to determine, and leave for future observation.

There is an objection to the use of marble for miniature pictures, which at first sight seems of a very formidable nature,—its liability to break; but I have not found this

a very serious evil ; for, of the many hundreds of pictures I have painted upon it, only one has been yet broken out of my hands, and it happened under circumstances that would have injured any picture whatever. When such an accident occurs, however, it is not without remedy ; for the fractured marble may be easily and accurately joined together by cement. In the instance to which I have referred, I applied white of egg to the edges of the fracture, dusted upon it a small portion of recently burned lime from a linen bag, and brought the edges accurately together on a flat table ; when dry, I ran along the slight groove on the surface a pencil charged with the “constant white” in general use, and afterwards levelled the surface with a sharp scraper and painted it over. In this instance, and others which I afterwards tried as experiments, no injury could be readily perceived on the surface of the pictures, and their strength was as great as at first.

The method of painting upon marble differs very little from that pursued with ivory ; any necessary deviation, such as may be required in washing in the first effect—the use of more or less gum at different stages of the picture—and the mode of applying the scraper (a more essential tool to the marble than the ivory painter), suggesting themselves at once to the practised artist. On this subject, therefore, it is unnecessary to enlarge.

I am, Sir, &c. &c.

A. AIKIN, *Esq.*

THOMAS CARRICK.

*Secretary, &c. &c.*

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Several specimens of miniatures painted on marble accompanied Mr. Carrick’s communication, eminently shewing his taste and ability as an artist, independently

of the fitness of the material for the use to which he has applied it. Statuary marble, however, is an aggregate of crystalline grains, and the reflection of light from the surfaces of these grains, if they are at all coarse, will occasionally interfere with the effect of the painting. The finest grained marbles alone should therefore be selected, and especially that kind called Dolomite marble, which, from its opacity and compactness of texture, would probably be found entirely free from the above-mentioned imperfection. While the Committee, to whom the subject had been referred by the Society, were engaged in its investigation, they were informed by Mr. C. H. Smith, a worker in marble, that Mr. Rivière, of Cirencester Place, Fitzroy Square, had applied to him full twenty years ago for some thin slabs of white marble, intending to make use of it as a material for painting on. At the request of the Committee, Mr. Rivière favoured them with his attendance, and produced a small picture of a group of figures painted by him on marble twenty years ago. He stated, likewise, that other engagements had prevented him from pursuing the subject further; but that the late Mr. Paul Violet had in the Water-colour Exhibition in Bond Street, several years ago, some large pictures painted in water-colours on slabs of marble.

These circumstances are stated, not for the purpose of throwing the slightest suspicion on the originality of Mr. Carrick's invention as respects that gentleman, but that justice may be done to all parties.